

The 'Velvet Revolution' In Jordan

By Gail Pressberg

Jordan's "velvet political revolution" signals good news for United States interests, for Israel and for Jordan's own future.

The cabinet of Jordan's newly appointed government - led by Prime Minister Abdelkarim Kabariti - brings sweeping new personnel changes with a younger generation

of Ministers. Kabariti, former Foreign Minister, is a young technocrat who rose to political prominence through his election to the Jordanian Parliament. As chairman of the parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, Kabariti used his position during the often cantankerous parliamentary debate to obtain a majority legislative vote in favor of Jordan's peace treaty with Israel.

A strong supporter of peace with Israel, Jordan's new Prime Minister has simultaneously built strong ties to the Palestinian Authority (PA) and pledged, during Arafat's recent visit to the Jordanian capital, to strengthen relations between Amman and the PA. Kabariti is also a powerful public advocate for Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Authority's creation of a vibrant regional economic axis.

As he retains the portfolio of Foreign Minister, Kabariti's appointment will be good news for Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and will be seen most negatively by

Iraq. Kabariti takes a hard-line view toward Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq and is strongly supportive of King Hussein's determination for Jordan to have a role in determining the future of Iraq.

Kabariti has long held the view that Iraq has been an economic and political nemesis for Jordan. Vis-a-vis Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, he has been instrumental in forging improved ties with these countries - deeply strained since Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. His appointment just days before King Hussein's first visit to Saudi Arabia since Jordan's acquiescence to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, is meant as a positive message to the Saudi monarchy which will undoubtedly be well received.

Jordan's new Prime Minister represents an important trend in his country and will have strong support for a foreign policy that seeks to form alliances based on pragmatic interests. This can only spell good news for the United States, Israel, the Palestinian Authority and those Arab countries seeking to create a new Middle East.

If Kuwait's appointment spells good news for Jordan's moderate foreign policy, it also appears promising on the domestic front. Having been a rising star in Jordan's elected parliament, Kabariti has developed great respect for Jordan's recent experimentation in democratization. He understands that he needs to gain the support of a parliament which sees its role as representing the public upon whose confidence it will be necessary to achieve in order to win reelection. In fact, twenty four of thirty Cabinet Ministers appointed by Kabariti are also elected members of the Parliament.

In order to heal the government's strained relations with the media, and simultaneously promote Jordan's peace policy with Israel, Kabariti's appointment of Marwan Mausher as Minister of Information is most welcome. This information Ministry will be critical to convincing a skeptical Jordanian public that peace with Israel is beneficial. Mausher, Jordan's very able first Ambassador to Israel spent several years in Washington building a very credible information office for Jordan in Washington. Those of us who knew him during his years in Washington found him to be an

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